

T-539

RALPH T. WEBSTER (skipjack)  
Tilghman, Maryland

RALPH T. WEBSTER is a 47.7' long two-sail bateau, or V-bottomed deadrise type of center-board sloop, commonly referred to as a skipjack. She has a beam of 15.3', a depth of 3.5', and a net registered tonnage of 8. She carries a typical skipjack rig of a jib-headed mainsail and a single large jib with a club on its foot. Built in 1905 in Oriole, Maryland following traditional Bay design and construction methods, RALPH T. WEBSTER is significant as being one of the 35 surviving traditional Chesapeake Bay skipjacks and a member of the last commercial sailing fleet in the United States. RALPH T. WEBSTER is of special interest as being one of the older skipjacks in the fleet and one of the 19 surviving working skipjacks to have been built previous to 1912.

**Maryland Historical Trust  
State Historic Sites Inventory Form**

Survey No. T-539

Magi No.

DOE   yes   xno

**1. Name** (indicate preferred name)

historic RALPH T. WEBSTER

and/or common skipjack

**2. Location**

street & number Gibsontown Road n/a not for publication

city, town Tilghman n/a vicinity of congressional district First

state Maryland 024 county Talbot 041

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property** (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Buck Garvin

street & number telephone no.:

city, town Tilghman state and zip code Maryland 21671

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. n/a liber

street & number folio

city, town state

**6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys**

title Survey of Surviving Traditional Chesapeake Bay Craft

date 1983-1984 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle

city, town Annapolis state MD 21401

## 7. Description

Survey No. T-539

### Condition

☐ excellent  
☒ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

n/a  
☐ original site

☐ moved date of move

n/a

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

This vessel is a 47.7-foot long two-sail bateau, or V-bottomed deadrise type of centerboard sloop, commonly referred to as a "skipjack." She was built in 1905 in Oriole, Maryland for the oyster dredging fleet. She has a beam of 15.3 feet and a depth of 3.5 feet, with net registered tonnage of 8 tons. She carries a typical skipjack rig with a jib-headed mainsail laced to the boom and carried on wood hoops at the mast, and a single large jib with a club on its foot. The wooden hull is painted white with accents in red copper bottom paint on the caprail, the end of the bowsprit, and the board spanning the davits. The bottom is painted red.

The vessel has a modified longhead bow and a straight stem with little rake. Her transom stern is shallow, with a long "tuck" meeting the chine. The rudder is carried outboard on pintles mounted on the transom and skeg.

The deck is flush, with several deck structures. From the stern forward these include: a box over the steering gear; a main trunk cabin fitted with a slide; a small hatch; a box over the winders; and a main hatch. Some of the fittings for oystering were temporarily removed for the summer. A pushboat is carried on davits over the stern.

The single mast is well-raked aft, about 15° to 20°. It is set up with double shrouds and deadeyes, as well as with a forestay, jibstay, and topping lift. Lazyjacks are used to quickly furl the sails. The bowsprit is set up with a double chain bobstay and two chain bowsprit shrouds. The boom, new in 1983, is jawed to the mast.

In addition to the decorative red accents on the hull (on caprail, taffrail, end of bowsprit, and davit-board), the vessel has trailboards mounted on the longhead. These are of unfinished wood with the name RALPH T. WEBSTER on them.

## 8. Significance

Survey No. T-539

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates	1905	Builder/Architect	Unknown
check:	Applicable Criteria: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D		
	and/or		
	Applicable Exception: <input type="checkbox"/> A <input type="checkbox"/> B <input type="checkbox"/> C <input type="checkbox"/> D <input type="checkbox"/> E <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> G <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> none		
	Level of Significance: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> national <input type="checkbox"/> state <input type="checkbox"/> local		

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

This vessel is significant as being one of the 36 surviving traditional Chesapeake Bay skipjacks and a member of the last commercial sailing fleet in the United States. Out of a fleet of hundreds of skipjacks that worked Bay waters in the early years of this century, today only this small number remain to carry on the tradition of working sail.

The skipjack evolved as a distinct type of Bay vessel in the 1890's as a cheaper-to-construct alternative to the earlier bugeyes and other traditional framed craft, in a period when shipbuilding costs were rising and the oyster catch was diminishing. The type was devised by enlarging (to 25 to 60 feet) the hull of the ordinary, unframed, square-sterned Bay crabbing skiff, and giving it a deadrise bottom, a deck, a cabin, and a sloop rig. The result—with its unframed, hard chine, cross-planked, V-bottom—proved inexpensive to build, easy to repair, and could be constructed by a competent house carpenter. Skipjacks were specifically designed as oyster dredge boats, with wide beams and low freeboard lending stability and providing a large working space on deck. The single masted rig, with sharp-headed mainsail and large jib, was easy to handle, powerful in light winds, and handy in coming about quickly for another pass over the oyster beds.

The Maryland oyster season begins November 1 and ends March 15. Skipjacks must dredge under sail on all days except Mondays and Tuesdays, when they are allowed to use their motorized pushboat for dredging. The pushboat, normally carried on davits at the stern, is lowered into the water and literally "pushes" the skipjack along from behind, the nose of the pushboat resting against a "jig" on the stern of the skipjack. The pushboat can also legally be used to get the skipjack to and from the oyster beds each day. Each skipjack's crew is made up of the captain, who is often also the owner, and five crew members.

RALPH T. WEBSTER is of interest as being one of the older skipjacks still dredging in the Chesapeake fleet. She was built in 1905 in Oriole, Maryland following traditional Bay-area design and construction methods. She has worked in the oyster-dredging fleet since her building, based at Deal Island until sold to Tilghman owners in the 1960s. The vessel is one of the 21 surviving working skipjacks to have been built previous to 1912, although, like the other members of the fleet, she has been much repaired over the years. RALPH T. WEBSTER is known for having captains well along in years—Capt John Wilson, who dredged her at the age of 91, and Capt. William Berridge, who worked her when he was close to 80.

See Thematic Group nomination cover form, Continuation Sheets  
No. 8-13.

T-539

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of nominated property less than one acreQuadrangle name Tilghman, MDQuadrangle scale 1:24000UTM References do NOT complete UTM referencesA 18 384240 4285550  
Zone Easting NorthingB           
Zone Easting NorthingC         D         E         F         G         H         

Verbal boundary description and justification

This working vessel is usually docked at the location indicated in Item 2. Historic boundaries are coterminous with the hull.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

**11. Form Prepared By**name/title Anne Witty/ M. E. Haywardorganization Radcliffe Maritime Museum  
Maryland Historical Societydate May, 1984street & number 201 West Monument Streettelephone (301) 685-3750city or town Baltimorestate Maryland 21201

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Shaw House  
21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 269-2438

# Maryland Historical Trust

## State Historic Sites Inventory Form

### 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic RALPH T. WEBSTER

and/or common skipjack

### 2. Location

street & number Gibsontown Road ☐ not for publicationcity, town Tilghman ☐ vicinity of congressional districtstate Maryland ☐ county Talbot

### 3. Classification

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
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	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
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city, town Tilghman state and zip code Maryland 21671

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street &amp; number folio

city, town state

### 6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title

date ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

pository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

Survey No. T-539

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date of move _____
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		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1905 Builder/Architect Unknown

check: Applicable Criteria: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D  
and/or

Applicable Exception: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Level of Significance: ☐ national ☐ state ☐ local

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. T-539

Howard I. Chapelle, American Small Sailing Craft (New York: W.W. Norton, 1951)H.I. Chapelle, Chesapeake Bay Skipjacks (St. Michaels, Md: CBMM, n.d.)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle scale \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A 

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Zone Easting NorthingB 

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Zone Easting NorthingC 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification \_\_\_\_\_

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Anne Witty/ M.E. Hayward

organization Maryland Historical Society

date 5/84

street &amp; number 201 W. Monument St.

telephone 685-3750

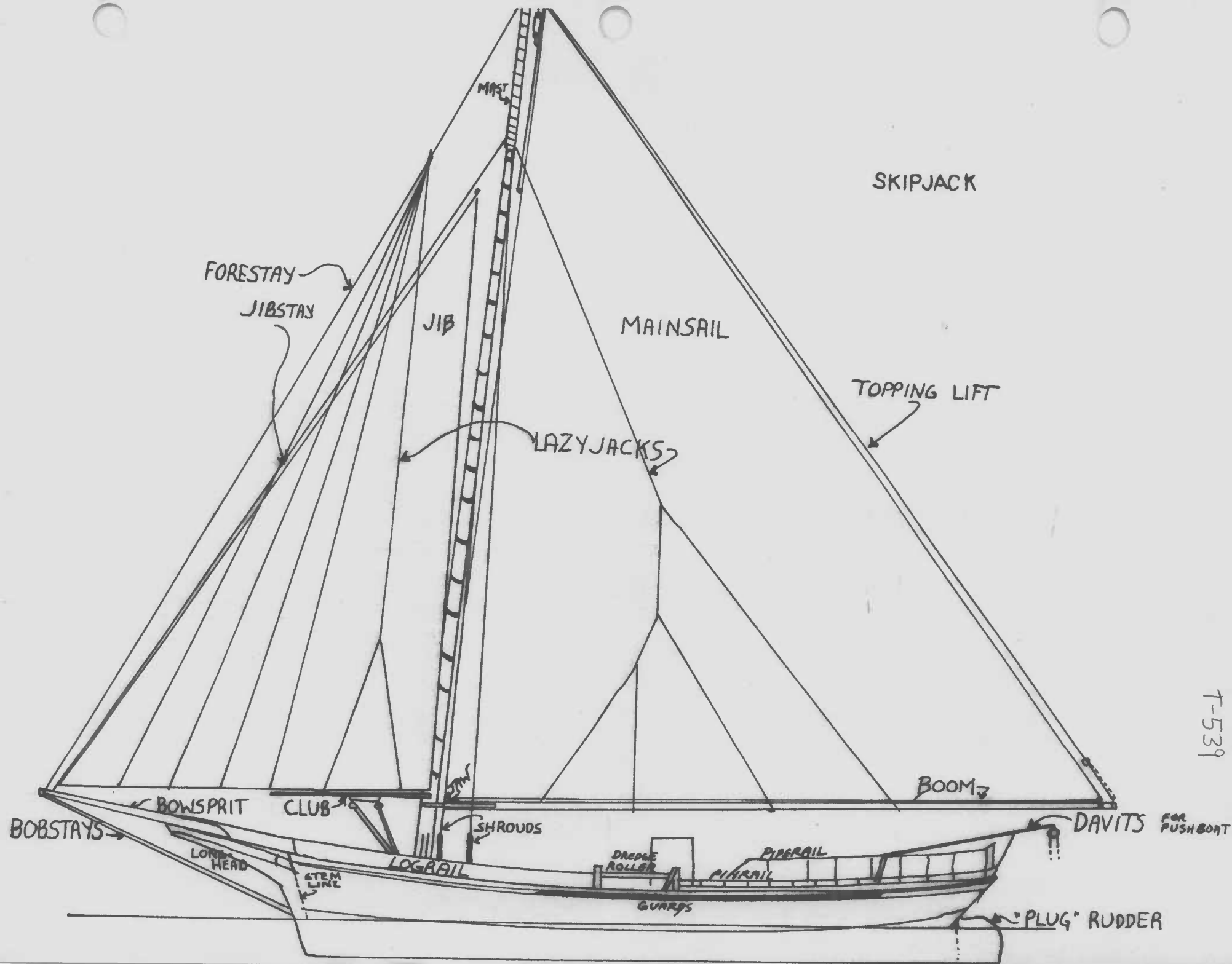
city or town Baltimore

state Maryland 21201

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T-539



T-539

RALPH T. WEBSTER  
Tilghman, Md

872

starboard side  
M.C. Wootton

10/83



T-539

RALPH T. WEBSTER  
Tilghman, Md

stern (RT.)

M.C. Wootton

10/83



T-539

RALPH T. WEBSTER  
Tilghman, Md

port bow  
M. C. Wootton

10/83





314-10

T-539

RAPLH T. WEBSTER  
Tilghman, Md.

Stern

M.C. Wootton      10/83